

Testimony of
Donald D. Owens
Chief of Police, City of Titusville, Pennsylvania

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Child Welfare Agencies”

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Chairman Souder, Ranking Member Cummings, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, I thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the challenges and problems related to methamphetamine that we have encountered in Titusville, Pennsylvania. My name is Donald Owens; I am the Chief of Police with the Titusville Police Department in northwest Pennsylvania. I have been with the department 22 years and have been Chief for the past five years. In my years of service in law enforcement, dealing with the methamphetamine epidemic in my community has been the greatest challenge I have faced.

Small Town Titusville

Titusville, Pennsylvania has that small town feel of comfort and security that many people seek today as they tire of the fast paced hustle and bustle of the big cities. People who grew up here then moved away to pursue education and career goals, often move back to raise their families. Titusville has always been a safe, close knit community.

The town's population of just over 6,100 hundred is deceptive. Titusville serves as the hub of activity for the tri-county area covered by the Titusville School District, which has a population of about 16,000. In addition, an influx of tourists in the summer and sportsman through the fall and winter greatly increases Titusville's transient population. The Oil Creek Valley offers many historic attractions related to the oil industry and was just named as a National Historic Region.

Founded in 1796, the town grew into a prosperous lumber community during the early 1800s. In 1859, an event occurred that changed Titusville, and in fact the world, forever. Colonel Edwin L. Drake drilled the world's first commercially successful oil well just outside of town and Titusville became the "Birthplace of the Oil Industry." In the early 1900s, the oil industry began to move out of the area into more lucrative fields in Texas and Titusville's economy declined. Fortunately, it didn't take long for a new industry to emerge to fill the gap.

Specialty steel brought renewed growth to the area. At one point, the main steel plant in town employed over 1,200 people. In 1992, the bottom fell out of the economy in the area. The steel plant was sold and the new owners closed it down. The mid 1990s were a time of severe economic hardship in the area. Many people were on unemployment or turned to welfare. This was also the time that methamphetamine, or meth, first made an appearance in Titusville.

Titusville's First Encounter with Meth

Prior to 2001, few people in Titusville had ever heard of methamphetamine. Things were about to change, however. That was the year that the first major meth ring in the Titusville area was busted. Eighteen individuals were arrested, including the individual thought to be responsible for bringing meth to the area. As the investigation was pieced together, it was learned that this individual used to travel to California to bring back drugs, mainly cocaine. His connection there introduced him to methamphetamine and taught him the cooking process. He brought this information back to Titusville in the mid 1990s. He controlled the meth trade in Titusville with an iron hand, guarding the cooking process and ensuring that only "quality product" was produced. Meth purchased from him during the investigation was sent to a lab to be processed. The lab reported it as "the purest meth they had ever seen." This in part, probably helped build

Titusville's reputation as the Meth Capital of Western PA. It was reported that individuals from as far away as 300 miles were coming to Titusville to get this new drug.

The Titusville Police Department was aware of this individual's drug use and sales, but his operation spread far beyond our jurisdiction. With the assistance of the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office and the Pennsylvania State Police, a five year investigation finally resulted in arrests being made and the drug ring being broken apart. Or so we thought.

The arrests turned out to be the start of the problem, not the end. Whereas the "ring leader" had guarded the secrets of the cooking process in order to control the trade, after he was arrested he began to teach others the process while out on bail awaiting trial. He taught a lot of people. What started as an investigation of eighteen people, with easy to follow flow charts connecting each person, has grown into a web so tangled and far spread, flow charts now provide little help. It is estimated that one cook will teach ten others the process. Approximately 60% of those individuals will start their own "labs". And then each of them will teach ten others, and so forth. Well, this individual started that process here. Soon the number of cooks and users was growing exponentially.

When you hear about the meth production in the western or mid-western parts of the country, you hear about large cartels, usually Mexican cartels. As you know, these groups are strictly in the meth business for profit. They move into an area, cook large batches of meth, and then take their product and leave the waste behind. This is not the case in Titusville. We have never seen any evidence of cartels working in rural western Pennsylvania. The cooks and users in the Titusville area are all interlinked. Most can trace their meth use back to that first individual. They all know each other and usually work together to secure the items needed to cook. They cook to support their own habit, not to make money. The Titusville Police have yet to find a cook who isn't a user or a user who doesn't know how to cook meth. The problem in rural Pennsylvania started with one person and has spread out from there. Arrests have been made as far away as Mercer, PA, and Erie, PA, that have been linked back to Titusville's meth problem.

As I said, 2001 was the start. Below is a breakdown of the labs seized in the five county region covered by the PA Attorney General's Northwest Drug Task Force.

	2001	2002	2003	2004
Crawford County	2	3	7	41
Erie County	0	2	8	10
Venango County	0	4	11	11
Warren County	1	1	0	3
Forest County	1	1	3	4
Regional Totals	4	11	29	69
State Total	19	34	64	127

Crawford County has had the largest increase in lab activity over the span of four years, taking a big jump from 2003 to 2004. Of the 52 labs seized in Crawford and Venango County in 2004, 23 were directly related to the Titusville area and Titusville Police Drug Task Force investigations (this includes labs seized in Forest County and other locations outside the Titusville School District). So far in 2005, 15 labs have been seized in the Titusville area: four within the City limits and eleven in the surrounding communities.

Since April of 2001, nearly 60 individuals from the Titusville area have been arrested for the manufacture, possession, and/or distribution of methamphetamine. Of those 60, about 50 were arrests made directly by the Titusville Police Department. Others were arrests by the Attorney General's Office, Pennsylvania State Police, or other departments.

Meth Presents Many Challenges to the Community

Looking at the statistics on labs seized or arrests made does not tell the whole story of how methamphetamine affects a community. It doesn't tell you about the strain placed on police. It doesn't tell you about the devastating effects of this drug on the people, the economy, and the environment of a community.

Titusville Police have come a long way in their dealings with methamphetamine since that first investigation. Most of what we have learned, we learned by trial and error. We didn't understand the dangers of clandestine meth labs. Officers would serve search warrants and enter meth houses without realizing the potential health risks. At one of the first labs ever seized, several law enforcement personnel ended up being taken to the hospital after inhaling toxic chemicals. We were lucky no one was seriously hurt or killed. That incident made us realize that we needed to learn as much about this drug as we could. Officers attended classes taught by law enforcement officials from Missouri and other states that had been dealing with the problem for several years. We learned quickly. The more we learned, however, the more we became aware of how big a problem we had.

The methamphetamine epidemic in our community presents many challenges to the police department. I would like to highlight some of our more serious concerns.

- **Manpower and Money.**

Titusville Police Department has 15 full-time officers, including myself. All of the officers in the department work on drug investigations within the City. The problem that the Titusville Police Department faces is that, as I stated, the City of Titusville serves as the center of activity for the communities that make up the Titusville Area School District, which covers approximately 200 square miles spread over three counties and has a population of roughly 16,000. While all fifteen officers can fight the meth problem within the City, until recently only five officers, working through the auspices of the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Drug Task Force, were able to work on investigations in the surrounding communities. The Titusville Police found that the harder they pushed the cooks and dealers in town, the more they just moved their labs into the outlying areas where it was easier to hide. Through a new

funding source, all of the officers in the department can be assigned overtime to work on drug investigations outside the city.

Since 2001, the number of overtime hours put in by officers on the drug task force has more than tripled. In 2001, 107.5 hours, about \$2687.50 in costs at an average of \$25/hour, were documented for meth investigations. In 2004, 287 hours, about \$7175.00, were documented. So far in 2005, 151.5 hours, about \$3787.50 in overtime costs, have been recorded. These figures may not seem like a lot for many departments, but to a department of 15, this is a lot of time and money. These figures do not include time spent for report writing or court appearances. Much of that time is done during the officers' regular work hours and limits the amount of time available for routine patrol work.

Moreover, the 2005 figures could potentially have been much higher at this point of the year. Like many other small departments, Titusville has to deal with officers being off for extended periods due to injury or illness. During the first four months of 2005, Titusville Police Department was down five officers, a full third of the department was off because of injury, illness, and in one case, active military duty. The officers that would normally spend their overtime hours working on the task force were now needed to put in overtime just to fill regular shifts and ensure that we had enough officers to cover the day to day emergency calls. You can only expect an officer to put in so many hours of overtime. At some point it becomes a safety issue.

These figures only include overtime submitted to the Attorney General for reimbursement. As I stated, we have spent over \$3500 in overtime for drug investigations so far this year and could have spent more. We will probably spend well over \$10,000 in overtime for drug investigations this year. This does not include overtime hours spent by the officers working on drug cases that fall strictly under our jurisdiction. The police department's annual overtime budget is \$45,000. Normally about a third of that is dedicated to methamphetamine investigations. Without the assistance of the AG's Office, we would easily be spending over half of our overtime budget trying to combat this drug problem.

Titusville Police Department is fortunate to be able to draw on the resources of the Attorney General's Office Drug Task Force and the Pennsylvania State Police Clandestine Lab Response Team to assist in seizing meth labs. Without their help, the financial burden to the City would be overwhelming. Luckily we also have the support of a very giving community. In 2004, as part of our fight against drugs, the department decided to purchase a police canine. We sought donations from the community and were able to raise over \$29,000 for the purchase of a drug detection canine and a new patrol car for the K-9 Unit. We were asked many times 'why don't you just get a grant for the dog' or 'why can't you get grants to help fight this meth problem'. There are no simple answers to those questions except to say 'we've tried'. That is another hurdle with which Titusville, like many small departments, has to contend. Grants are hard to find and extremely competitive. What we are finding with many government grants is that in post 9/11 America, funding is geared towards large cities or in dealing with threats from foreign terrorists. I would never say that foreign terrorists do not pose a serious threat to our country, but we should not focus all our efforts in an outward direction and ignore the problems coming at us from within. Small town rural America is

crying for help with our own form of terrorism, clandestine methamphetamine labs and drug use, and we feel that no one is listening.

The methamphetamine epidemic has created other manpower issues. Titusville Police Department has always had a very strong community policing policy which included conducting “walk & talks” through neighborhoods and the downtown and presenting community education programs. Since 2003, our community policing efforts have centered almost entirely around methamphetamine. That year, we realized that we needed help from the entire community in fighting the meth problem. However, we never anticipated the overwhelming response our education efforts would generate. The number of tips received has significantly increased. Every day, several calls are received from individuals or businesses reporting suspicious activity that is meth related. Officers are stopped while on patrol and given information. They are stopped while off duty or called at home by individuals who know they are officers and want to relay information. We could assign one officer to spend their entire 40 hour work week doing nothing but keeping up with the intelligence reports and following up on leads. The problem is that we don’t have the manpower to focus solely on meth, as we do have other crimes in town.

- **Increasing Crime Rates**

In 2001, while the state’s violent crime rate was going down, Titusville’s violent crime rate doubled. That was also the year we had our first serious meth related violent crime in the City. A man high on methamphetamine went to a known dealer’s house looking for more meth. He encountered several people outside the house. Following an altercation with another male, he pulled a gun and shot the man in the leg. He then waved the gun at the people in the yard, pointing it at a baby in a stroller at one point. The shooter fled the scene and went to an apartment building where he barricaded himself inside for several hours before the State Police SERT team fired tear gas into the house and he was forced to come out.

In the past two years, minor crimes such as retail theft and criminal mischief have actually decreased in the City. Serious crimes such as burglaries and assaults have increased. We are finding that many of these more serious crimes are related to methamphetamine use.

- **Judicial Response**

This issue ties back to our manpower issues as well as being a major point of frustration for officers as they try to curtail the methamphetamine epidemic. Many of the 60 individuals arrested for methamphetamine in the Titusville area have in fact been arrested several times. At one house, labs have been seized on at least five separate occasions in the last year – two of the labs were seized within a week of each other. The officers spend numerous hours building a case against an individual for manufacturing meth only to have the charges pled down to a lesser count and the individual given what we feel is a rather light sentence, usually probation or a minimal amount of county jail time. Having pled guilty to or been found guilty of a meth related crime does not stop these individuals from continuing to cook or use meth. Suspects have no fear of being arrested. They have seen that when you are

arrested, nothing bad really happens to you. The police feel like their hands are tied and we are sometimes just going in circles. When we hear comments from the public, it is always that they feel the police aren't doing their job. We often receive calls or officers are stopped by citizens who ask why we can't do anything with these meth cooks. They see us arrest them and they see them walking the streets again within days. Here are just two examples that illustrate our frustration:

- Titusville Police made a stop on an individual for a traffic violation. The day before, he had been found guilty of manufacturing methamphetamine and was out of jail on bond while awaiting sentencing. In his car was all the equipment to cook a batch of meth. The stop led to a search warrant being obtained for his residence and the discovery of a second lab.
- On another occasion, an individual was arrested for manufacturing meth. He pled guilty to a charge of possession with intent to deliver and the manufacturing charge was dropped. This is an individual who has been arrested by Titusville Police on numerous occasions. He received a sentence of 24 months probation. While on probation, he has been urine tested numerous times. Each time, he has tested positive for methamphetamine. While on probation, he was arrested and charged by Titusville police yet again for manufacturing methamphetamine after items consistent with a lab were found at his residence. Finally, he was placed in jail on a probation violation following this arrest.

There also appears to be a disparity between how methamphetamine cases are treated in the judicial system from one county to another. As I mentioned, Titusville is located where three counties come together. Our drug investigations have led to arrests in all three counties. Recently, a disparity between Crawford and Venango Counties has come to light.

In Crawford County, the officers are required to obtain much more information and evidence of lab activity before the District Attorney will authorize a search warrant, to the point that one lab was lost because the suspect became aware of the investigation and destroyed the lab prior to the officers being able to gather the needed information. The Venango County District Attorney will allow officers to get search warrants with much less information, and the search warrants have been upheld when contested in court. In Crawford County, individuals arrested for methamphetamine manufacturing have been known to receive very low bond conditions, sometimes being released on unsecured bond. In Venango County, we are seeing bonds set at \$50,000 to \$100,000 cash on a regular basis. As stated, individuals tend to receive probation or light sentences in Crawford County. We are seeing much stiffer penalties in Venango County. This inconsistency across the court system is extremely frustrating. Perhaps some of the problems within the judicial system come from the courts lacking an understanding of the seriousness of the problems we face in dealing with methamphetamine.

Effects of Meth on People, the Community, and the Environment

It is estimated that only 5% of those who are addicted to methamphetamine will ever be able to kick their habit and stay clean. That is 5% of those who seek help. An article just last week in the local paper reported that the number of people seeking help for meth addiction through the Crawford County Drug & Alcohol Executive Commission had nearly doubled in the past couple of years, up from 14 in 2002-03 to 27 in fiscal year 2004 -05. What the article doesn't report is how many of those 27 individuals are there under a court order. We have found that meth addicts, the serious meth addicts that we deal with on a regular basis, will not seek help unless they are court ordered to do so. Those who seem to be able to get away from the meth while in jail serving a couple of months sentence will go right back to it as soon as they are released. I'd like to share the personal side of methamphetamine use in Titusville, its effects on the people, the community and the environment. These accounts will hopefully give you a better understanding of the devastating and far-reaching dangers of methamphetamine.

- The People.

That first individual who brought meth to Titusville needed to find places to cook that were secluded and where he would not draw the attention of a lot of neighbors. Through his dealings, he became acquainted with a woman who came from a very well-to-do family. She and her husband owned several hundred acres in the country. On the property was a "camp" that they did not use very often. This woman's husband was a former oil company executive and they were very prominent in the community. But, no one knows what goes on behind closed doors. Evidently there was something in this woman's life that made her go looking for some excitement. She had heard from some friends about meth and that it helped you lose weight. She thought this would be ideal for her perceived weight problems and she began taking meth. Soon she was letting the meth "ring leader" cook at her remote camp. She would often be present when he was there cooking. He would supply her with methamphetamine in exchange for using the camp. At first, the drug was "a wonder drug" for her. She dropped a few pounds and had all kinds of energy while on the high. She described it as being able to do house cleaning and other chores at a supersonic pace for many hours. She thought it was great. Then, the drug started to take over her life. She became paranoid. She started seeing green lights floating in the trees or coming under the door into the bathroom to get her. She thought people were living in the trees. She tried to hire a friend to shoot them for her. She wore rubber bands around her wrists to keep the aliens away. This all occurred in a short time period of just several months. Her life was falling apart. That was when the police knocked on her door. She was one of the eighteen people arrested during that first meth sweep in 2001. Because she had no past history and she cooperated fully with the police, she received a probation sentence. She quit meth on her own and started to work towards recovery. She started attending church again and leaned on her church family for support. When Titusville Police started doing their community programs, she offered to come and talk about how meth had affected her life. She seemed to be doing okay. But, there was always that feeling in her mind that she had let her family and friends down. She was ashamed of what she had done. She always thought that when she walked in to the grocery store or the beauty shop or a doctor's office that people were talking about her. In the fall of 2003, she apparently couldn't take the pressure of that feeling of

disappointment any longer. She committed suicide in the very camp where she had watched meth being cooked. She was 47.

Titusville Police were dispatched to a disturbance – a man standing outside his residence yelling and threatening people. When the officers arrived they indeed found this gentleman standing outside, yelling at people, breaking glass, and basically terrorizing his neighborhood. The man's actions were unpredictable. He would go from screaming at the police to stay away from him to begging them to help him. It was all two officers could do to finally wrestle him to the ground. He was handcuffed, behind his back, and placed in the backseat of a patrol car. While being transported to the police station, he at one point wedged himself onto the narrow ledge behind the seat against the back window. Then he proceeded to get down in the seat and literally rip the inside of the door apart with his teeth. The man had never been known to be violent prior to this incident. When he finally came down off his high, he stated that he did not know what happened. He remembered smoking a marijuana joint, but nothing after that. The investigation revealed that one of his "friends" had laced the joint with methamphetamine without the man's knowledge.

A man high on methamphetamine, upset that his wife had left him, went looking for her in Titusville. At one point he entered a residence, just walking in the back door without knocking. Then for some reason, he went to Titusville's water works plant to look for her. He broke into the plant and took one of the trucks for a joyride. When a city worker responded to the plant because the man set off the water pump alarms, the man tried to run him over with the truck, smashing through a gate and chasing him across a parking lot. Luckily the city worker was not seriously injured and no serious damage was done to the water plant, but the city worker is still suffering from emotional distress caused by the incident.

Children are often found living in houses where meth is cooked or used. The meth so consumes the parents that they don't care about taking care of their children. One young girl reported that her mother and another woman would lock her and her siblings out of the house while they did meth. Or, they would go into a shed in the backyard and lock themselves in it while they got high. The young girl said that she and her siblings were expected to go to relatives' or neighbors' houses.

On another occasion, Titusville Police were called to the Titusville Hospital because a woman had come in and just left three children at the main switchboard. When police finally located her, she stated that her neighbor had asked her to watch the kids while she ran some errands. "That was three days ago," she said. The mother had not returned and the woman thought that the hospital would know what to do with the kids. Once the mother was finally located, it was discovered that she had been out tweaking on meth with her boyfriend.

At another lab, two small children were taken out of the residence. During the course of their search, officers discovered a small table in the bathroom, about 2 feet high. On the table was a mirrored dish with a powdery substance on it. The substance turned out to be methamphetamine, well within the reach of the curious toddlers.

Below are some items that were recently taken out of meth labs. You can see how easily kids could think that it was okay to drink whatever was in the bottles. It looks like a bottle of Coke, maybe some water, or how about a Mello Yello. But in reality the bottles contain some very dangerous chemicals.



A.



B.



C.

A. Sodium hydroxide (Lye) mixed with water and iodine. This would melt the skin in your mouth and throat causing irreparable damage. To a child it looks like a bottle of Coke.

B & C. Both these bottles contain hydrochloric acid. This could blind you if it got in your eyes, chemically burn the inside of your mouth, or, if enough was swallowed, cause an electrolyte imbalance in your system and kill you. This could easily be mistaken for water or Mello Yello.

The incidents with children provides evidence that the methamphetamine problem is not strictly a law enforcement problem, but one that many social service agencies are facing as well. We deal with Children and Youth Services in our county on a regular basis while they follow up on reports of children being in meth houses. We are looking to work with them and the Department of Health to develop Drug Endangered Children protocols for our area that we hope will eventually be enacted statewide. These agencies, however, face the same manpower and money issues that the Titusville Police face. The methamphetamine epidemic is over-taxing many agencies.

- The Community.

The use of methamphetamine has brought an unwanted type of attention to Titusville, including national attention. As we stated, Titusville has long been known as the “Birthplace of the Oil Industry.” When residents would travel outside the area and tell people where they were from, people would say “oh, Drake’s Well”. Now, when you mention that you are from Titusville, you are more likely greeted with “oh, the meth place”. In an Associated Press article taking about how meth is becoming a major problem in Hawaii, Titusville was mentioned as an example of meth’s effects on rural America.

Recently, a suspected methamphetamine lab was seized at a residence within the City. During the course of the investigation, video tapes were discovered showing three individuals having sexual relations with a dog. The tapes were taken to the District Attorney

and, on his recommendation, charges were filed. At the individual's arraignment, the local media picked up on the story and published an article on the front page. Within a day, national news had picked up on the article. References were made on the Steve & D.C. national radio show which is carried on a local station. Internet sites posted the story. The local paper, which can be read online, allows for posting messages about articles. Responses were posted from individuals as far away as Great Britain. The City became the brunt of numerous dog jokes. One citizen advised the police that she had received an email from a friend in Texas that began "woof woof woof." While one of the suspects was in the Crawford County Jail awaiting his hearing on the meth charges, the other inmates would walk by him and bark. But, he is an adult. The ones that were truly hurt by the actions of these three individuals were their school age children. They have been harassed mercilessly by other children, to the point that they do not want to go to school anymore. The actions of the three adults have been attributed by some to their involvement with meth.

The real victims of meth are kids. Even kids whose parents aren't involved in drug use are victims of the meth problem in the community. Students from Titusville get teased and harassed by other schools. At athletic events in other towns, the chant of "methheads" is often directed at the teams and Titusville fans in attendance.

When the steel industry left the area, a group was formed to work to bring new business to Titusville. The former steel plant was redeveloped into the Titusville Opportunity Park which is able to house several small to mid-size industries and businesses. The Titusville Redevelopment Authority has worked hard to bring businesses to town. They have expressed their concern about the methamphetamine problem. Several businesses have indicated that they are hesitant to move into the Titusville area because of the problem. Without economic growth, the City may have to eventually cut back on services, including police services. Our small department is already barely staying even with the growing meth problem. A cut in the number of officers or in financial resources for our department would probably allow the meth epidemic to grow beyond our capacity to deal with it.

Taxpayers in the City are not going to be able to bear the burden as more houses are removed from the tax rolls because they have been condemned and torn down due to meth. Houses in otherwise well-kept neighborhoods become blights to the community as junk piles up in their yards and the houses fall apart from neglect due to methamphetamine. Below are two meth houses in the City that illustrate these conditions.





- The Environment.

The conditions in meth houses are deplorable. We were once told by a narcotics agent who had worked in inner-city Philadelphia and entered some of the worst slums in some of the worst neighborhoods that he had never seen anything as bad as some of the living conditions at meth houses in the Titusville area. There is often filth and garbage all over the floors. Pots, tubing, burners and other items used for cooking meth are left laying all about. The residue and chemicals given off during the cooking process permeate the walls and furniture. Children can become “contaminated” because the chemicals will be absorbed into their skin. Below are several pictures taken of a local meth house.





These conditions are typical of what we find at meth houses. Several labs have been taken out of this residence.

A farm, located across the road from a residence where several labs had been seized, began having problems with its cattle herd. Several of the cows died while birthing their calves and other calves were stillborn. The water in the pond where the cattle drink tested. It proved to be very acidic, most likely contaminated by runoff from the lab sites or because the toxins had seeped into the water tables. Meth cooks don't care what happens to the toxic waste they are producing. They dump the waste on the ground or down their septic systems. They leave their discarded labs in the woods, in creeks, or just dumped along the roadway. This dump, which contained numerous meth related chemicals, was found on the property across the road from the farm.



In Conclusion

As I stated, dealing with the methamphetamine problem has been a great challenge. I have only been able to illustrate a few of our concerns and the challenges we face. The problem is big and getting bigger every day.

We are trying to reach out to other areas across Pennsylvania, to share our experiences and let them know what kind of storm is headed their way. We continue to work with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, the Pennsylvania State Police, the Clandestine Lab Response Team, and other local law enforcement agencies to combat the meth problem. We have recently been able to discuss our needs for additional help and resources with the United States Attorney General's Office in Erie, PA. We have been working with Congressman John Peterson to address the methamphetamine problem and develop strategies to deal with it as it moves across the state. Congressman Peterson has been instrumental in bringing agencies across our state together to address this problem. I would like to to this time to thank Congressman Peterson for his help.

What are the solutions to this problem? I don't think there is going to be a quick fix to this problem any time in the near future. This drug has a strong hold on rural America. Some of the things that would help our fight in Pennsylvania would be additional financial resources on the state and federal level. I would encourage Congress to continue funding programs, such as the COPS program, through which department like Titusville Police may be able to hire additional officers to combat the methamphetamine problem in the region. Additionally, we would like to be able to use the resources of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) on a regular basis. The problem we have is that the nearest office is in Pittsburgh, nearly two hours away, and it is not cost effective for agents to travel to our region to investigate "small labs". An office in Erie or Meadville, PA would benefit the entire northwest Pennsylvania region.

Rural America needs help. Rural America needs opportunities like this to express our concerns to you, our representatives in Congress. Rural America needs for someone to listen and to take action before the methamphetamine epidemic completely swallows us up.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak here today. If there are any questions, I would be pleased to answer them at this time.